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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 001821

SIPDIS

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TAGS: ASEC OVIP PGOV PREL TU

SUBJECT: U/S GROSSMAN'S 12/9/03 MEETING WITH ISTANBUL GOVERNOR GULER

Classified By: Consul General David L. Arnett for reasons 1.4 (b) and (

d).

¶11. (C) Summary: U/S Grossman met with the Governor of Istanbul to express U.S. solidarity with the people of Istanbul and Turkey, and our ongoing cooperation in the war on terror. Guler outlined a series of "lessons learned" from the attacks, and expressed optimism that Turkey would be better prepared in the future to interdict larger-scale attacks. Guler expressed thanks for USG support against terrorism in the past, and some frustration at European attitudes regarding threats to Turkey. U/S Grossman thanked Guler for excellent cooperation in the war on terror, including assistance in safeguarding USG personnel here in Istanbul. End Summary.

¶12. (U) U/S Grossman met December 9 with Istanbul Governor Muamer Guler. Guler, a career civil servant in the Ministry of the Interior, oversees the security apparatus for the Istanbul province, and directly oversees GoT measures in response to the four bombings which took place in Istanbul in November.

"Not quite ready" for attacks

¶13. (C) Guler was candid in his observation that Istanbul was not fully prepared for coordinated attacks like those which took place in November. Guler said that, in the past, Istanbul had seen its share of smaller-scale terrorist attacks, such as those carried out by PKK/KADEK, DHKP-C, and others. He said that Turkey has now realized the need to prepare for larger, coordinated attacks.

¶14. (C) Guler thanked the U.S. for its consistent support of Turkey in the context of the war on terror. Guler said Turkey looks for such support from our European allies as well, and hopes that all governments see such attacks as attacks against civilization and humanity, not just Istanbul and Turkey. U/S Grossman said that the USG, from President Bush and Secretary Powell to Amb. Edelman and CG Arnett, have conveyed our sense of solidarity with the people of Turkey. U/S Grossman said he went to the sites of the attacks, Neve Shalom Synagogue and the British Consulate General, to personally express his solidarity, and was impressed by the spirit of the people of Istanbul, who are already rebuilding.

EU surprisingly alarmist

¶15. (C) Guler noted that, while U.S. support for Turkey has been strong in the wake of the attacks, "our European friends have been unexpectedly worried." He said that 25 percent of tourists coming to Turkey visit Istanbul, and recent EU statements saying that Turkey and Istanbul are not safe hurt Turkey, which is what the terrorists want. U/S Grossman noted that in the past the USG has tried to focus the attention of our European allies on terrorist groups which attack Turkey. He said it is unfortunate that the EU often takes too long to see these groups as terrorists. U/S Grossman noted, however, that we will continue to work with the EU and others to keep them focused on these groups, closing their offices and cutting off their finances. U/S Grossman highlighted the upcoming NATO Summit in Istanbul as a major opportunity for Turkey to show the EU and others its progress in democracy, economic, and social development over the last 20-25 years.

Attackers' Profile and Whereabouts

¶16. (C) Guler addressed the issue of cooperation with Syria in

pursuing suspected bombers. He said that it now appears that Azad Ekinci planned the attacks, and that he had escaped to Syria. Syria quickly responded to the attacks by arresting 20 people and immediately turning them over to Turkey. After interrogation by GOT officials, it became clear than most of these people had little to nothing to do with the attacks (most of whom were school children), and only one was finally arrested. Guler said Turkey knows for the most part who the assailants are, and believes 4-5 people are still at large, and probably entered Syria at the time of or soon after the attacks. Guler added that he believes Syria is "trying to be as helpful as possible within the framework of the Adana Agreement between Turkey and Syria."

17. (C) When asked about the possibility of any links that these terrorists may have with Iran, Guler replied that "Turkey has no problems with Iran. One key figure, Yusuf Polat, was caught by Iranians at the border." Guler said that "it is quite clear that a group of friends came together in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Syria. But, the button for this attack was pushed by al-Qaida." Guler described the group as a "platform," which was organized and trained abroad, but which hosted others who came from outside and carried out the attacks. He noted that this "platform" type of organization made detection difficult.

Cooperation in war on terror

18. (C) U/S Grossman also expressed thanks on behalf of the USG for the assistance and protection that U.S. military and diplomatic personnel have received in Istanbul. "We appreciate your efforts to keep us safe," he said. "We remain ready to cooperate with you in an effort to stop these terrorists."

19. (U) U/S Grossman cleared on this cable.
ARNETT